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RISE, PROGRESS,

AND

ANTICIPATED

DECLINE OF THE REFORM ACT,

ON

THE AFFECTIONS

OF THE

PEOPLE OF ENGLAND;

TOGETHER WITH

A FEW DESULTORY REMARKS

ON THE

LATE AND PRESENT ADMINISTRATIONS.

BY

A NORFOLK COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

YARMOUTH:

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RISE, PROGRESS,

&c. &c.

In tracing the history of Lord Grey's ministry, and of the origin of the Reform Act, it is necessary to commence my observations at the downfall of the Duke of Wellington's administration, which took place in the month of November, 1830; and it must be allowed by every impartial observer, that the Duke and his party, at that time, had completely lost the confidence of the House of Commons, and of the country. His fall was not, as many may suppose, owing to his memorable declaration, that he would hear of no reform—it was the consequence of his own acts and ill-timed observations, when in power. The first circumstance that injured his popularity, was his treacherous conduct towards the country with respect to the Roman Catholic Relief Bill. At the time he was declaring to the country that it was not the period for passing that measure, he, at the same moment, was preparing a bill secretly, and also persuading George the Fourth to consent to the emancipation of the Catholics; and which, in an evil hour, he most reluctantly did. By the Duke's and Sir Robert Peel's conduct in this matter, the Tory party, who had always looked up to them as their chiefs and guides, became disunited; and the Whigs, by this means, gained an

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accession of power. The Duke of Wellington, then, to render himself still more obnoxious to the aristocracy and the middling classes, declared that he looked upon county meetings as farces—a remark, I hope, too insulting to a free country to be soon forgotten; for, if it is allowed, the oldest and most valuable of our rights, that of petitioning, is completely destroyed: these, the most remarkable, with several other measures and circumstances, gradually paved the way for his fall. But the measure which proved his immediate overthrow, was his refusal to allow the nation to enquire into its own expenditure on the question of the Civil List; and here the Commons gained such a majority, that he was compelled to resign.

Lord Grey and his party were then called to His Majesty's councils, under three specific pledges. 1st. Peace; 2nd. Retrenchment; and 3rd. Reform. And now let us enquire how they have fulfilled them. The first, it must be admitted, has been maintained, but, according to my opinion, at the expense of the character of the nation; and whether peace has been placed on a more permanent footing than previous to their taking office, is a question for the present, which admits of considerable doubt. The precedent they have established, of the right of interfering and assisting with other powers in arranging and deciding the private quarrels between the King of Holland and his rebellious subjects, is, to say the least of it, a dangerous one.

I now come to the second and most important question, *Retrenchment*—and I ask the country how

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this pledge has been fulfilled: is the country satisfied with the manner in which its financial affairs have been managed, or not? Even the present House of Commons, who have most zealously, most ardently, supported Earl Grey and his party, declared that the budget of the Chancellor of the Exchequer was a failure. With these facts staring the country in the face, is it quite certain that such men are capable of forming a new constitution? And I now, therefore, come to their last pledge, *Reform*. This question has excited the country from one end to the other—all classes and all degrees have been equally clamorous for a reform; and it is true that Lord Grey and the rest of the ministers have brought forward, what is called, a full and efficient measure. But let me ask the country to pause, and ask themselves dispassionately, what they all mean, and what they all want by reform; and I do not hesitate to say, if they answer the question conscientiously, one and all will agree, it is an improvement in their various conditions in life. But, before I proceed any further, I wish to enable all those persons, who are so enamoured of this full and efficient measure of reform, and who cry out so vehemently for "the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill," to record their opinions at the present time, and two years after it has passed, to ask themselves, whether they do not most bitterly lament the delusion that was practised upon them?

For the sake of perspicuity, I shall divide the country into two great classes. 1st. The capitalist; which comprehends men of every grade who possess

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wealth, and lay it out with the hope of its increase, whether as commercial men, manufacturers, or agriculturists. 2nd. The labouring classes; which are all those who bring this capital or wealth into a productive state: for without the first, namely, capital; the second, namely, the labourer, must be idle; and without the second, the first must remain dormant, and, consequently, unproductive and valueless. These truths are so self-evident, that I shall not enlarge upon them. But, although I have divided the country into two great classes, namely, the capitalist and labourer, and to whom I particularly wish to address myself, still I must not omit to mention another and a highly-important one—the fund-holder and annuitant of every sort—these latter form a complete exception to the others, as they are alone benefitted by low prices; whereas, I mean to maintain, the others can alone flourish under high ones. Low prices in a highly-taxed country, like England, are a fallacy and a complete absurdity; and, indeed, their existence and prosperity are quite incompatible: and be it remembered, that these ideas of low prices originated from the political economists, those extremely clever fellows, Lord Grey, Lord Brougham and Vaux, Lord Althorp, and Mr. Poulett Thompson,—men who would almost persuade you by their sophisms and eloquence, that you might live upon air, if not upon nothing; and the country flattered itself, that, if these men could but once obtain the reins of government, there would be nothing but smiling faces, full purses, and every thing else that man could desire in this sublunary world.

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I must just observe in passing, that there is some little inconsistency in these aforesaid very clever fellows, and in all reformers, who, I suppose, are of the same kidney, and clever *par excellence*. I say, that I think there appears some little inconsistency in these men affirming that the House of Commons is so corrupt, and yet, in the very same breath, they declare that the country has returned nothing but reformers; and that the House of Commons is, at the present moment, the echo, the very fac-simile of the majority of the nation. Their assertions mean or amount to this—that, at the present time, all interests are fully represented, if they mean any thing; for they cannot deny but that they have asserted over and over again, that they have all the wealth, talent, and rank, on their side. Why, if such is the fact, and which I will not gainsay against such veracious opponents, do they not prove to the country, that it is in their power to improve its state, and relieve it from its present difficulties? Why not do for the country what it only requires, which is, to give to the capitalist increased profits, and to the labourer, increased wages? No man can say with truth, that he has any political grievance to complain of; the question of reform is nothing more than a question of pounds, shillings, and pence.

I consider this part of the subject so important, that I shall revert to it again presently; in the mean time, I wish to draw the attention of my readers to the old constitution, and I shall endeavour to shew that, with all its abuses, it possesses some merits, and in former times, it had a considerable share of the affections of

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the nation. Most things with age acquire some degree of reverence, and on that score I think it entitled to attention; for it should be remembered, that the Protestant constitution of England, consisting of King, Lords, and Commons, each possessing distinct rights and privileges, was fully and firmly established in the year 1688, at the period when James the Second, who professed the Roman Catholic religion, was obliged, by the almost unanimous voice of the nation, to abdicate his throne; and, in consequence, his daughter Mary, being a Protestant, and who had married William of Holland, ascended it amidst the acclamations, and to the great joy and satisfaction of the people of England. It is therefore clear it has some claim to antiquity, as the present state of things has existed one hundred and forty-four years, almost unchanged; at least, no places have been disfranchised, nor any towns, however numerous the population, enfranchised: and yet it must be allowed that England has increased in wealth and power in a ten-fold degree, in proportion to her size, to any other country, and at the same time, the liberty of the subject has never been entrenched or encroached upon by any of the three powers composing the constitution; and it may truly be said, that England was a kingdom preserved amidst the wreck of the world, and with all its anomalies, it has worked well; and surely, if such is the case, common sense and common gratitude should satisfy us, that we owe some little to the excellence of our institutions, and to the form of our government.

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It is impossible, in a short pamphlet like this, to advert to all the excellencies or demerits of the present constitution, and I shall not be so foolish as to assert, that it is perfection. The most apparent defect, and I believe, the most complained of, is the existence of nomination-boroughs, vulgarly termed rotten; and at first sight, and before their use has been enquired into, they do appear anomalous and unjust, particularly if the House of Commons is to be considered as composed of only representatives of the people: but still even these, at any rate, must be allowed to possess some merit, and to have done some service to the state, when it is recollected that it was owing to them, that many men of the greatest talent, first had the honour of a seat in the House of Commons. There was Pitt, Canning, Fox, Sheridan, Burke, Wyndham, Liverpool, Chatham, and many others; and therefore, if they have opened the door to some abuses, they have, on the other hand, infused considerable talent and importance; and I should doubt that man's judgment or honesty, who would declare, unhesitatingly, that they are unnecessary, for it was only the other day, that we had an instance in proof to the contrary, and it must be fresh in the recollection of every one. I allude to the circumstance when Mr. Stanley, one of the cabinet ministers, vacated his seat, and attempted to obtain his re-election at Preston; but, being opposed by Mr. Hunt, he lost it, and was glad to take refuge in the Royal Borough of Windsor. I wish to draw no invidious comparison between Mr. Hunt and Mr. Stanley, but I think the reformers or innovators themselves will give a prefer-

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ence to the latter. There is a degree of elasticity and adaptation to circumstances in the old composition, that I fear you would look for in vain, in the new one; and the country should be careful that in grasping at the shadow, it does not, like the dog in the fable, sacrifice the substance.

I will not waste my readers' nor my own time in discussing the almost innumerable absurdities and incongruities that exist in the new constitution or reform act: but there are three of the clauses I will just briefly allude to. 1st. The ten-pound qualification in London, and which, to every one at all acquainted with the persons who would compose such a constituency, must, at once, strike them as being much too low; they are neither by their education or by their property, at all qualified to form an opinion who is a competent person to serve them in parliament. But even supposing that they are capable, by giving them a vote, you are doing an indirect injustice to persons one degree above them, and the persons who alone are entitled to such a trust, or who alone would exercise it for the benefit of the country. There being so many ten-pound occupants, their votes would have the effect of neutralising all the voters above them. I will endeavour to exemplify my meaning by taking the following example—supposing a master bricklayer or carpenter, or any other tradesman, and possessing capital, is by that means enabled to employ ten labourers. I ask, which is most entitled to a vote, the tradesman possessing property, or the labourer possessing none? It is very clear the former is; and yet it is ten to one

but that, in times of popular excitement, his property will be thrown completely out of the scale of representation. 2nd. As to the propriety of dividing the counties. And here, even the friends of the measure themselves have their doubts, as to whether it will not have the effect of making them close boroughs, (the western division of Norfolk, for instance) as it is feared that there are some men possessing such immense wealth and influence, that they will be enabled to send two of the members, which is quite impossible at the present time. The agricultural interest should consider well this part of the measure, as their interest is now but barely supported; and what will it be then, when two of its representatives are sent by one person, and the other two, in all probability, by the overwhelming voters of some large town? The county of Essex is already beginning to fear that such will be the case with themselves, and where there is a constituency of five thousand persons.

The third and last clause that I shall make any allusion to, is schedule B; and here the climax of chicanery is practised on the country by this delusive and barren measure: for, by this schedule, it is intended to deprive every corporation borough, that has not two thousand inhabitants, of the right of sending two members—a right that each has had for time immemorial; and be it known, not under the influence of any one person, and therefore cannot be considered a nomination borough; and what is still more impertant, never having been convicted, or even accused, of any political delinquency. But to sum up the,

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whole—the act is replete with fraud, ignorance, and delusion; and, to use the emphatic language of my Lord Brougham, "stinks in the very nostrils of all honest and rational men."

But we will now suppose, for the sake of argument, that the reform act has passed, and become the law of the land, the country having undergone the fiery ordeal of an election by the ten-pound voters; and I beg to ask, whether a House of Commons so elected, would be capable of doing more than the present one? I put it to Lord Grey, Lord Brougham and Vaux, Lord Althorp, and Lord John Russell, whether they can lay their hands upon their hearts, and declare before their God, their king, and their country, that they sincerely believe that the act will have the effect of satisfying all parties in the state, and of improving their various conditions? and if they can answer this question in the affirmative, I will say they have acted like honest men, and friends of their country: but, if they cannot, I should not hesitate to denounce them as traitors to all that is honourable, and they would each deserve to have written on their dishonoured graves, the following epitaph:—

> May this dreary abode be for ever unknown,
> For ever by virtue, by pity, untrod;
> Unbreath'd be his name, and unhonour'd his stone—
> The foe of his country, his monarch, his God.

It shews too plainly how bad a cause must be, when a party is obliged to resort to personal abuse and to popular clamour for support; and yet it cannot be said by any one, who speaks the truth, that my Lord Grey

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and his friends are free from the charge. Is it not very well known that Lord Grey, Lord Althorp, and Lord John Russell, have each corresponded with the political unions? assemblies that are not acknowledged to be legal. Have they not all of them used that equivocal language in parliament that must incite the people to outrage and violence? I say, without the least fear of contradiction, that they have; and their speeches, as reported during the discussion of the reform bill, will substantiate the fact. But this is a matter of little consequence, and should by me have passed unobserved, had they not also, by their low cunning, tended to lower His Majesty in the eyes of the nation; and there is only one circumstance that I will mention, to prove that they have done it, and it is the following—was it not reported repeatedly in the various newspapers, that the King had given a carte-blanche to my Lord Grey, to create as many peers at any moment, as were required to carry the reform bill? Now, I do not mean to say, that my Lord Grey, Lord Brougham and Vaux, &c., were the originators or inventors of this falsehood; but if not the originators, they were the indirect abetters of its reiteration, or, to speak in common parlance, they winked at the commission of an injustice that might possibly tend to increase or maintain their own hollow and ephemeral reputations. Must it not be plain to every man of common understanding, that, had any one of them declared in their places in parliament, that no such pledge had been given by His Majesty, that the expectation by the country of such a creation would have dropped in an instant. Had such conduct as

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theirs been practised in private life, would they not have appeared degraded characters in the eyes of all honourable men?

When my Lords Grey and Brougham thought proper to resign their high situations, because His Majesty refused to create peers in the most unconstitutional manner and according to their advice, was he not traduced, abused, and insulted in every possible way? Was this a situation, I ask, for a monarch to be placed in?—a monarch who has sought the country's good ever since he has been on the throne. Was not also the Queen, in the most shameful, the most open, and the most atrocious manner slandered?—a Queen, whom it would be impertinence in me to say one word in her praise. But I will ask the country, whether or not, she has not consulted the interests of her subjects at all times?—has she not encouraged British manufactures, by always appearing in public in every thing that is manufactured at home?—has she not contributed out of her private purse most liberally towards the relief of the Spitalfields weavers?—does this shew that the Queen is neglectful or disregards the welfare of her poorer subjects? Are all the gracious acts of their Majesties to be cancelled or forgot in twenty-four hours, because a party cannot carry a measure according to their own desires, and be it known, in the most violent and illegal manner? But I tell the country, humble an individual as I am, and little gifted as I am in prophecy or foresight, that it will repent of having placed such unlimited confidence in broken reeds—in men, whose sole aim and object is office,

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however incompetent for it, and who would maintain their places at all hazards, and at all sacrifices, except perhaps consistency. There is, however, but poor merit in such a claim, when it is nothing but a continuance in error.

Having endeavoured to shew the fallacy of the country's expecting any benefit to arise from the reform act, I shall now dismiss the further animadversion on that subject, by pronouncing it an illusory and groundless measure.

In taking a common-sense view of the state of England, I find that her distress cannot be attributed by any reasonable person, to any defect in the present mode of electing the members to parliament; but it is chiefly owing to the erroneous principles of finance, and the great alterations in the commercial policy of the country, which have been pursued at the suggestion of the political economists, and particularly the arbitrary change that has taken place since the peace, in the currency of the country: and although Mr. (now Sir Robert) Peel has the credit of passing that unjust and fatal measure of the currency in 1819, it really was the fruit of the heated brains of theoretical schemers. In the year 1819, there was in circulation of Bank of England notes £30,000,000, and of country notes £30,000,000; in the year 1830, they were reduced, to Bank of England £19,900,000, and country notes £9,000,000, that is nearly one half: and I feel assured, that here alone is a sufficient cause for the greater portion of the distress. Perhaps it may be stated, that the deficiency is made up by an

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additional quantity of gold and silver; but I should say, that this was an assertion not to be met by arguments, nor by any statement of facts, but by the assertion, that it was not true, and that it was impossible that it could be true. Let any one decide the point by enquiring of either an agriculturist, manufacturer, or general tradesman, whether a banker is as ready as formerly to advance money; and I know that he will receive for answer, that he is not. The real question for the country to decide is, whether they will break faith with the public creditor, or have the currency of the country changed, and once more try the effect of high prices.

The remarks of Frederick the Great* and Napoleon,† as quoted in support of a restricted currency, respecting the fate of a nation which is governed by "philosophers" and "political economists," are strictly true; and a melancholy proof of their truth is furnished by the present situation of England.

* "If I wished," said Frederick the Great, "to reduce a flourishing province from the highest state of prosperity to the lowest stage of misery, I would desire no more effectual course, than to put it for ten years under the government of philosophers."

† "If an empire," said Napoleon, "were made of adamant, it would soon be ground to powder by political economists."

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